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The Death of a Prophet

The Reverend George McDougall was one of the pioneering missionaries of Alberta. His missionary zeal sent him on endless journies; but sometimes he would take time off from his missionary work to make a prophecy. He prophecied that Edmonton would become a great city. He instinctively knew that the beautiful Canadian Rockies would draw a vast tourist trade, and that the West would some day come into its heritage.

Among other missions he established, or helped establish, was the Stoney Indian Mission at Morley, under the shadow of the great peaks. The establishment of the Morley Mission was one of his last works, and it was near Morley that he died.

His son, Dr. John McDougall, no less a zealous worker than his father, tells the story of George McDougall's death . . . itself one of the sagas of the foothills.

"Early in the new year he (George McDougall) returned to

Morley, bringing word that the buffalo were now moving westward, and that this was now an opportune time for striking for meat, and as this was very much wanted by our party, arrangements were made to go out. Horses driven in, sleighs mended, and, at the last minute, the man we expected to go with us was not forthcoming. In vain we looked for another, and then father said, "I will go with you, for we must have meat." Our flour was getting low, and there were many mouths to fill. We started for the hunt, and procuring fire-wood by the way, pushed out on the plain.

"On the third day we came to the buffalo. The condition of the prairie for running with unshod horses was very bad. The weather was extremely cold. However, we secured some animals; but Saturday morning found us with about half loads, and the weather getting colder all the while. We saw that the buffalo were slowly moving westward, we concluded to go back with our teams to the first point of willows, where we could get wood, and there spend the Sabbath, hoping that the weather would moderate, and the buffalo draw nearer. We spent a quiet Sabbath in our leather lodge. Our party numbered five. An Indian and his boy, about twelve years of age, had joined us to obtain meat for themselves. Our party proper was composed of father and his nephew, a lad he had brought from Ontario on his last trip, and the writer.

"Monday morning, from a hill alongside of our camp, we could

see buffalo. Father and I, taking four sleighs with us, and a little wood on one of them, and two loose horses for running, started out towards them. The Indian and his son, with one sleigh, accompanied us. We left my cousin to look after the camp and watch the horses. The weather had moderated some, but the prairie was still very bad for unshod horses.

"Coming as near as we could without starting the buffalo, father took charge of the horses and sleighs, and I attempted to run, but so slippery was the prairie with its patches of snow and ice everywhere, that the sharper hoofed buffalo could get away from the unshod horse.

"Changing horses three times, getting one tremendous fall, which shook me up pretty well all over, I eventually succeeded in killing six buffalo. The Indian had not been successful. We gave him one and began the work of skinning and cutting up the other five. I t was now late in the afternoon. We had butchered and put on to the sleighs three of the buffalo. We were at the fourth. While I was working at this one, father said, "I think I will melt some sonw, John, and boil the kettle, and we will have a cup of coffee." Taking the little bundle of wood we had brought with us from the sleigh, father soon had a fire built, and the kettle boiling. It was now becoming dark. The coffee made, father said, "Come along, my son, this will do you good after the shaking up you have had today." We had a few small cakes with us. Eating these, and sipping

coffee and talking about our work, thus the night came on. I remember there was an odd cake; father said, 'John, you eat that, you have been working harder than I have to-day.' The coffee drank, we went at the buffalo again. Just as we were finishing the fourth animal, we heard the Indian call, and answering him, he came to us with his sled loaded with the animal which had been given him. Altogether then we moved on to the fifth animal, and now, with the Indian's help, we soon had this one skinned and cut up and loaded on to the sleigh. This being done, I put my running pad on one of the loose horses, and gathering up the lariat attached to the halter, handed it to father, expecting him to ride. I then said to the Indian, 'Go ahead, now, and I will drive my sleigh after you.' He said, "I don't know the way; I am a Wood Indian, I am not so much accustomed to the plains as you are." I said, 'I will tell you the way; you lead off with your horse and I will drive our four sleighs behind you, and if I see you going wrong, I will shout to you.' The Indian did as I told him, and I strung out our sleighs behind him. We were about eight miles from camp, and I should judge it was about eight o'clock at night. There was some wind blowing and some snow drifting along the ground, but overhead the stars were clear, and the night was fine.

"As I walked behind the last sleigh, father would ride beside me, or, dismounting, sometimes walk. We conversed about the

future, we talked about the orphanage that he hoped to build and be instrumental in establishing at the new mission he was to move on to in the spring.

"We came to the valley of the Nose Creek. Here there was a long incline to the creek. The Indian started off on a run before his horse, and I cracked my whip, and sent my horses after him. Father had been walking when we came to the top of the hill, and as the rest of us ran down the slope, we left him some distance behind. We crossed the creek, and were nicely strung out on the flat on the other side of it, and as fast as we could were making our way to the gently-rising hill near the summit of which our camp was situate. I should judge we were about two miles from camp, when father having mounted his horse, came up at a gallop. Instead of stopping behind, he rode alongside. I said, 'Father, are you going on?' 'Yes,' said he. 'I think I will go and get supper ready. That bright star there is right over our camp, is it not?' said he to me. I looked, and answered, "Yes." It was impossible for me to think that he could go astray. The landmarks were extremely good; the night was not stormy. Away he rode into the darkness. Little did I think that I had spoken to my father for the last time in this world.

"We went on to our camp until we were within two hundred yards of it, being situate down in a little valley. When I came in sight of the spot I saw no light; my heart misgave me. I

rushed the horses up to the tent, and shouted, 'Father; father. Moses; Moses.' (This was the name of my cousin we had left in the camp that morning.) But no answer came. I jumped into the lodge. There was no fire. I felt around, and found the boy buried under the buffalo robes, evidently having become frightened as night came on. I shook him up. Said I, 'Moses, did father come?' He said, 'No; I have not seen him.' I jumped out and grasped my rifle, which I had fastened on one of the sleighs, and fired several shots in rapid succession. I told the Indian to shoot off his old flint-lock, and he did so repeatedly, putting in large charges of powder. Then I said to myself, how foolish to get so excited. If father has missed the camp, he will be in before I can get these horses unharnessed; or he has ridden past to hunt up our horses we left here to-day; and with this thought I went to work and unharnessed the horses, and disposed of them for the night. But no father came. We did the best we could.

"The next morning, with the first peep of day-light, I found the horses, and was glad to see that the one he had ridden was not with them, for I had thought, that father might have been thrown, and hurt badly, and if so, the horse would come to his partners. He was not there, and again I said to myself, it is now daylight, and by the time I get these horses back to camp father will be there; but he didn't come. The Indian and myself scoured the country the whole day. We did it systematically.

The Indian was a first-class moose-hunter. I was no novice in such work. Evening came without a clue; then I said, father missed the camp last night, and passing on up to the ridge west of us, Morley would appear so near to him this morning, that he concluded to go right on to the mission. Some one will come out to meet us to-morrow. This was my theory; the Indian thought so too. Since Sunday the weather had been moderating.

"Monday night, when father left us, it was comparatively fine. Tuesday was a beautiful winter's day. Tuesday at midnight the weather was still fine. Shortly after this the wind changed, and a most terrific northwest storm set in. It was impossible to move on the plains. Sheltered as we were in the valley, we had hard work to keep the fire going. We said, No one will start from Morley to-day. The storm continued all day, and a greater part of the following night.

"Thursday morning bright and early, we started for hime. Getting my party fairly on the way, I left them to come on, and hurried home, reaching there late Thursday night, but father was not there. Then he must have gone to Calgary. We hurried down to Calgary. There were no tidings of him. We secured help and began the search. Saturday afternoon we found the horse. Saturday night we heard from sone half-breeds that they had seen a man leading a horse, the whole description corresponding to him and his horse. The time they had seen him was on Tuesday afternoon. Some continued the search, and others went for more help,

and on Sunday we had all the available force we could get out on the search, but the weather became intensely cold, and Sunday night we had to fall back on Calgary for food and wood.

"We then saw the necessity of better equipment, and we went home and gathered in all our available horses and sleighs, and starting out with all the men we could get, we camped on the spot, and continued the search.

"The following Sunday I was riding up a cooley, had dismounted and tied my horse, so that I might more effectually search the clump of brush I found there. Presently I heard some one shouting; running out, and getting on to my horse and moving up the hill, I found it was the man next to me in the line of search.

"Said he to me: 'They are making signs to me over yonder.'

"Ah, thought I, father is alive. I had not yet given him up. When I reached the now rapidly congregating party, my poor broken down brother said, 'Oh, John, father is dead; they have found his frozen body.' A half-breed, one who was not with us on the search, but was out hunting, had killed a buffalo, and going back to his camp, had taken his horse and sleigh and was making a bee line as much as possible to where his buffalo lay, and in so doing drove right on to father's lifeless body. He put him on the sleigh, and took him back to his camp, and sent us word. Soon we stood beside his lifeless form. A kind native woman had spread her shawl over it. I lifted the shawl,

and as I saw the position in which he had frozen, I said, 'Just like him; he was thoughtful of others, even at the last moment.' As I looked at him, and beheld his features, I said, 'Whatever may have happened to father, towards the last he was conscious, and feeling that death was upon him, he had picked a spot as level as he could, and laid himself out straight upon it, and crossing his hands, had thus prepared to die.' His face was perfectly natural. There seemed to me to be the expression upon it of conscious satisfaction. Reverently we lifted him and laid him on the sleigh, and solomnly we started on that Sunday afternoon on our homeward journey.

"The next day the party reached the mission. Fortunately we had as our mission teacher at this time a medical man, Doctor Verey. I asked him to examine the body, but to disturb it as little as possible. However, no clue as to what caused his death was discovered. My own theory is, that some disease affecting either his heart or brain, so acted upon him that for the time being he was unconscious of his surroundings; otherwise I cannot explain his being lost. We left him clothed as he had lived and walked last, in Western costume, thoroughly prepared for storm, as he knew well by long experience how to be. Thus he had taken his last walk, and strength failing, had laid him down and died.

"It was a sorrowful company that bore his remains to the grave, With trembling utterance we laid him in it, in sure and certain

hope of a glorious resurrection. His work is finished, but not forgotten, nor yet will it be. A faithful son, a true husband, a fond and righteous parent, a real patriot, a faithful missionary, such was father."

The old church still stands at Morley, and the wind has a lonely sound as it whistles past the tall, thin steeple. On the hillside above the church, George McDougall lies in his grave, and many who pass on the busy Calgary-Banff highway have scarcely heard of him at all. But George McDougall is doubtless watching the flowing into the mountains. Perhaps he is smiling; for his prophecy has come true.